UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/AC.183/SR.200
5 November 1993

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE OF THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS
OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 200th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Thursday, 16 September 1993, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. CISSE (Senegal)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.50 a.m.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

1. The agenda was adopted.

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN ON THE SEVENTH UNITED NATIONS EUROPEAN NGO SYMPOSIUM AND THE TENTH UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL NGO MEETING ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE AND ON THE UNITED NATIONS AFRICAN SEMINAR AND NGO SYMPOSIUM ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

2. The CHAIRMAN said that the Seventh United Nations European NGO Symposium and the Tenth United Nations International NGO Meeting on the Question of Palestine had been held at Vienna on 23-24 August and from 25 to 27 August 1993, respectively. The Committee's delegation had consisted of, in addition to himself, Mr. Hidalgo Basulto, Permanent Representative of Cuba to the United Nations and Vice-Chairman of the Committee; Mr. Farhadi, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations and Vice-Chairman of the Committee; Mr. Cassar, Permanent Representative of Malta to the United Nations and Rapporteur of the Committee; and Mr. Al-Kidwa, Permanent Observer for Palestine.

3. The theme of the European Symposium had been "The Middle East peace process: Palestinian rights and development - a challenge to Europe". It had been attended by representatives of 38 non-governmental organizations, including 15 observers. A number of representatives of Governments, United Nations bodies and intergovernmental organizations had also attended as observers. He had addressed the opening session on behalf of the Committee; the Permanent Observer for Palestine to the United Nations Office at Vienna and the Chairman of the European Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine had also made statements.

4. The programme had included presentations by eight panellists and resource persons and one plenary session entitled "Palestine - the current situation". The topics of "Palestinian national and human rights" and "Palestinian development" had been discussed in two workshops. The Symposium had adopted a final declaration, copies of which were before the members of the Committee. That document reaffirmed the commitment of non-governmental organizations to the Palestinian people, to their courageous intifadah and to their just struggle for self-determination and the establishment of their own independent and sovereign State. It called for measures to enable the Palestinian people, through their representative, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), to determine their own future, and for the full implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) as the basis for peace talks. It condemned the Israeli policies and practices of escalating violations of the human rights of the Palestinians in the occupied territories and urged the Secretary-General to convene the High Contracting Parties to the fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 with a view to determining ways and means of ensuring Israel's compliance with that Convention. In addition, it called upon European Governments and the European Community to take all necessary political and economic measures to Israel to abide by the fourth Geneva Convention. The European non-governmental

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organizations welcomed the Palestine Development Plan and pledged themselves to sustain and encourage all Palestinian efforts in the field of development. They also urged European non-governmental organizations and Governments to lend their full support to efforts aimed at achieving a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

5. Turning to the International NGO Meeting, which had been centred on the theme of "Renewing the United Nations-NGO commitment to Palestinian national and human rights", he said that it had been attended by representatives of 86 non-governmental organizations, including six observers, the representatives of 15 Governments and observers from a number of United Nations bodies and intergovernmental organizations.

6. The opening session had been addressed by: Mr. Wolte, Deputy Secretary-General and Director-General for European Integration and Economic Policy in the Austrian Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Mr. Nordenfelt, Director, Programmes against Apartheid and for Palestinian Rights, on behalf of the Secretary-General; the Chairman of the International Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine; and himself, on behalf of the Committee. In addition, a message from Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the PLO, had been read out by the Permanent Observer for Palestine to the United Nations Office at Vienna.

7. Nineteen panellists and resource persons had made presentations. Panels had been held on the following topics: "Political update - obstacles to peace"; "Urgent quest for independence: protection and end of occupation"; "Back to the future - a decade of United Nations-NGO networking"; "NGO forum: who is doing what?"; and "Future strategies in the role of NGOs".

8. A final declaration had been adopted, copies of which were before the members of the Committee. The participants had reaffirmed the Palestinian people's right of return and rights to self-determination and statehood, and had called upon the Israeli Government and people to recognize those rights. They had expressed their support for the peace process aimed at achieving a just settlement in the Middle East on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace. They had also called upon Israel to desist from all its repressive practices and to recognize immediately the de jure applicability of the fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, and had urged the United Nations to provide sustained protection for the Palestinians living under occupation. They had further urged non-governmental organizations to establish permanent monitoring and witness groups in the occupied territories and to provide means of protection. In addition, they had expressed support for comprehensive measures to control and eliminate weapons of mass destruction and had urged Israel to sign and ratify the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

9. At both the Symposium and the Meeting, the Committee's delegation had held separate meetings with the representatives of the European and International NGO Coordinating Committees, and had discussed with them in a friendly and cooperative spirit issues relating to their work and their relationship with the Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights.

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10. The United Nations African Seminar and NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine had been held from 30 August to 3 September 1993 at Dakar. Nineteen panellists from the African continent, as well as Palestinians and Israelis and representatives of 23 Governments, six United Nations specialized agencies and intergovernmental organizations, and 18 non-governmental organizations had participated in the combined meeting.

11. The main theme of the Seminar and Symposium had been "Africa, the Middle East and the question of Palestine". Panels had been held on such topics as: a just solution to the question of Palestine; Jerusalem: self-determination and statehood; and the need to revive the economy of the occupied territories. NGO workshops had also been held to promote action by African non-governmental organizations concerning the question of Palestine.

12. The Seminar and Symposium had been characterized by intensive deliberations during a week of extraordinary developments in the Middle East.

13. Since achieving independence, the African countries had adopted a principled and steadfast position of support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people in accordance with United Nations resolutions. Moreover, his country, Senegal, had held the chairmanship of the Committee since its inception. The meeting held at Dakar had made possible not only an initial assessment of the prospects for a just peace, but also a detailed examination of the current situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and a discussion of Palestinian needs and possibilities for action by the international community.

14. The conclusions and recommendations of the African Seminar and NGO Symposium demonstrated the participants' unanimous desire to support the evolution of the peace efforts and to contribute to alleviating the plight of the Palestinian people and ensuring the exercise of its right to self-determination and an end to the occupation. He noted with satisfaction that African non-governmental organizations had been able to lay the groundwork for more effective coordination of their future efforts in that regard.

15. Many of the recommendations made by the participants had been addressed to the Committee and to the United Nations system as a whole. As affirmed by the General Assembly in its resolution 47/64 A, and reaffirmed by the participants in the Seminar and Symposium, the United Nations had a permanent responsibility with regard to the question of Palestine until the question was resolved in all its aspects in a satisfactory manner in accordance with international legitimacy.

16. The participants had stressed that it was essential for the international community to intensify its support for the Palestinian people and its legitimate representative, the PLO, during the difficult transition process that lay ahead, a recommendation with which the Committee concurred. They had called for the provision of effective assistance to the Palestinian people to enable it to build its future institutions and to revive its social infrastructure and economy as a prerequisite for the full exercise of its inalienable rights.

(The Chairman)

17. The Committee would strengthen its efforts to monitor the situation on the ground, to bring to the attention of the international community new developments affecting Palestinian rights and to mobilize international public opinion and efforts in support of the Palestinian people, as well as concrete assistance designed to meet the Palestinian people's current and future needs.

18. The report on the African Seminar and NGO Symposium would be issued in due course as a publication of the Division for Palestinian Rights. A brief account of the proceedings would also be included in the monthly bulletin prepared by that Division. Furthermore, in accordance with the Committee's past practice, the meeting's conclusions and recommendations would be annexed to the Committee's report to the General Assembly at its forty-eighth session.

19. Mr. FARHADI (Afghanistan), Vice-Chairman, paid tribute to the Chairman for his able leadership of the Committee's delegation to the European NGO Symposium and the International NGO Meeting, and for his skilful handling of the often sensitive contacts among the various organizations and individuals in attendance including the Israeli and Palestinian representatives. The final documents adopted by those two meetings should be regarded as historic, since they represented the views of those interested in the question of Palestine prior to the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian accord on 13 September 1993. The participants in the meetings held at Vienna had emphasized their support for the constant struggle of the Palestinian people, the establishment of an independent Palestinian State and the right of the Palestinians to return to their homeland, as well as for the overall trend in the peace process. Those attending the meeting held at Dakar had shown an awareness that the Palestinian struggle had reached a critical turning-point. They had reaffirmed the right of the Palestinian people to independence and statehood and had called upon Israel, once again, to recognize those rights and to withdraw from the occupied territories, including Jerusalem, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

20. The CHAIRMAN expressed appreciation to the members of the Secretariat who had assisted the Committee's delegation at the Vienna and Dakar meetings. It was to be hoped that, once the Organization's financial crisis was resolved, the Committee would be able to have a full-fledged secretariat. He took it that the Committee wished to take note of the declarations adopted by the European NGO Symposium and the International NGO Meeting, as well as the conclusions and recommendations of the African Seminar and NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine.

21. It was so decided.

RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS RELATING TO THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

22. The CHAIRMAN said that on 10 September 1993 the Prime Minister of Israel and the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the PLO had exchanged letters of mutual recognition. On the same day, the President of the United States of America had announced his decision to resume a dialogue and contacts with the PLO. On 13 September 1993, at Washington, D.C., Israel and the PLO had signed a document entitled "Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements". The Committee welcomed that development, which was of utmost

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importance for a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine and a settlement of the conflict in the Middle East. It also represented the beginning of a difficult process which would require the continued support of the international community and specifically the United Nations.

23. Mr. AL-KIDWA (Observer for Palestine) expressed appreciation to the Governments of Austria and Senegal for having hosted the meetings referred to in the Chairman's report.

24. With regard to the important recent developments in the Middle East, he wished to clarify several basic issues. First, regarding the background to those events, a number of contacts had been held between the PLO and Israeli representatives at which various topics, including the Committee's areas of concern, had been discussed. Because of the clear-cut political position of the PLO, it had been well prepared to participate in those meetings. On the Israeli side, there had been a number of complications, but the decision by the Israeli Knesset to repeal the law prohibiting contacts with the PLO had opened the way to further talks between the PLO and Israeli Government officials. The so-called Oslo channel, through which most of the contacts had been maintained, had been opened in early 1993. A total of 14 meetings had been held with the participation of a Norwegian Government delegation. At a certain stage, other parties had been apprised of those contacts and of the serious intention of both sides to pursue further negotiations. Ultimately, a specific text had been agreed on and initialled by the two delegations. Thereafter, letters of mutual recognition had been exchanged between Chairman Arafat and the Israeli Prime Minister.

25. The document signed at Washington, D.C., on 13 September 1993, under the auspices of President Clinton and with the participation of the United States Secretary of State and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, was a declaration of principles. It was not an agreement or a treaty. It dealt, inter alia, with the establishment of Palestinian self-government during the transitional period and laid down a framework for negotiations concerning a final settlement based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). The Declaration of Principles also provided, as a first step, for complete Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and Jericho. It would be a grave error to characterize the document as a declaration of principles regarding the Gaza Strip and Jericho alone, since its scope was much broader than that.

26. The Declaration of Principles would become effective on 13 October 1993. The withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Gaza Strip and Jericho would commence within two months and would be completed within four months from that date. At the same time, an early transfer of power would take place in the remainder of the Gaza Strip in education, health, taxation, and other fields. Three months later, when the Israeli withdrawal had been completed, democratic and free elections would be held in all Palestinian territories to elect the self-governing authorities. Palestinians living in Jerusalem would be able to nominate candidates for election and to vote. On the eve of the elections, the Israeli army would withdraw from densely populated areas and from the remaining portions of the West Bank. The Israeli army would be repositioned in certain areas agreed on by both sides.

(Mr. Al-Kidwa, Observer, Palestine)

27. Throughout the transitional period, security and police services would be provided by external Palestinian forces, consisting of members of the Palestine Liberation Army currently stationed in Egypt and Jordan. An arrangement would be made for the return of the Palestinian refugees, who numbered at least 500,000, and, by some estimates, as many as 750,000.

28. The important issues of Jerusalem, settlements, boundaries and refugees must be negotiated before the final settlement, which was to take place in two years. The Declaration of Principles was a basic and important step on the road to a comprehensive peace in the Middle East and offered a new beginning for the region, but, on the long and difficult road ahead, his delegation would need the full support and assistance of friendly countries. Palestine was about to negotiate a number of agreements with the Israeli Government, which would provide the first test of its readiness to implement the principles in full. His delegation noted with pleasure the developments between Israel and Jordan, and expected that similar developments would occur with Syria and Lebanon.

29. In his meeting with the Secretary-General, the Chairman of the PLO had stressed the paramount importance of the United Nations role in any future settlement. He had expressed his belief that United Nations participation in all areas of the transition process was vital, as was wide-ranging United Nations technical assistance. It was hoped that negotiations between Palestine and Israel would lead to the presence of military observers. The Secretary-General had constituted a high-level working group on United Nations activities in the occupied territories and would send a delegation to Tunis to negotiate with the Palestinian leadership. At the request of Palestine, a delegation would be sent to refugee camps outside the occupied territories in order to evaluate their immediate needs. The PLO would continue its contacts with the Secretary-General.

30. With regard to Palestinian action within the United Nations and at the forty-eighth session of the General Assembly, his delegation affirmed its complete commitment to the peace process and the agreement between the two sides. It was willing to reflect recent positive developments in its work at the United Nations and was prepared to end the state of antagonism and confrontation by reconsidering certain parts of the usual resolutions on Palestinian issues. At the same time, the United Nations must take ongoing responsibility for the question of Palestine until a final settlement was achieved, including the issues of Jerusalem and an independent Palestinian State. The position of the General Assembly was based on ethical and legal foundations that would remain valid and effective until a comprehensive solution had been achieved. His delegation's stance was balanced and took into consideration positive developments, while upholding the main principles of the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, and it hoped that friendly States would adopt a similar stance. The Committee's work had been valuable to the Palestinian people in the past and would continue to be important as it proceeded towards autonomy.

31. Mr. KALPAGE (Observer for Sri Lanka) said that the Chairman's detailed reports on the regional seminars indicated the vigilance of the world community in regard to the struggle of the Palestinian people. The Committee's efforts had undoubtedly contributed to the historic events earlier in the week. The

(Mr. Kalpage, Observer, Sri Lanka)

observer for Palestine had clarified some important points. As the Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, Sri Lanka had never wavered in its support for the courageous struggle of the Palestinian people and was fully aware that a comprehensive peace must include a solution to the question of Palestine in all its aspects. Accordingly, his Government would cooperate in a review of all resolutions regarding Palestine at the forthcoming session of the General Assembly.

32. Mrs. VASISHT (India) said that the Indian Government had taken a stand in support of the Palestinian people. It welcomed the mutual recognition by the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization and the signing of the agreement on Palestinian self-rule as notable steps towards ensuring peace and stability in western Asia, a region troubled by strife and discord for many generations. Her Government congratulated the Chairman of the PLO and his negotiators for their courage in taking the first but essential step and also noted the pragmatism and foresight of the Israeli leadership in arriving at the present agreement. India would continue to support further efforts towards peace in western Asia and would lend its good offices, whenever required. It expected those historic steps to lead to further positive developments aimed at achieving the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. When achieved, the agreements between Israel and Syria, Jordan and Lebanon would introduce an era of amity, peace and prosperity to the region. India hoped for that prospect in the larger interest of world peace and stability.

33. Mr. KITTIKHOUN (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that his Government welcomed the Declaration of Principles and considered it a result of the constructive efforts of the PLO and Israel. Its signing was an important step for all peoples of the region and of the world but it was merely a first step, and his Government reiterated its support for the struggle of the Palestinian people.

34. Mr. ABDERAHMAN (Observer for Egypt) conveyed his delegation's sincere congratulations to the Palestinian people on the Declaration of Principles. Its signing was an important step towards the fulfilment of the Committee's mandate and the implementation of relevant United Nations resolutions. His delegation was hopeful that a way had been opened towards a comprehensive and just peace. The Committee had played an important role in support of the Palestinian people's struggle, and it was to be hoped that the United Nations would continue to provide support in order to enhance the chances for the success of the agreement.

35. Mr. RAZA (Pakistan) said that his delegation welcomed the signing of the Declaration of Principles and congratulated the Palestinian leadership on that courageous step. The role of the United Nations was of extreme importance, and it had a permanent responsibility to the people of Palestine until the situation had been fully resolved. His Government would give its full support to the peace process.

36. Mr. DIARRA (Mali) said that the information provided in the statement by the Observer for Palestine would be useful to the Committee in organizing its future work. His delegation was pleased that the Palestinians had renewed their

(Mr. Diarra, Mali)

confidence in the United Nations and its role in a future settlement. The Committee should reorient its work to reflect the new phase of construction of the territory being granted autonomy.

37. Mrs. BARGHOUHTI (Observer for Palestine) expressed the appreciation of her delegation to the Committee and to all friendly countries for their support to the cause of the Palestinian people and the achievement of its inalienable rights, including self-determination.

38. The CHAIRMAN, speaking as the representative of Senegal, said that his Government had been pleased that the announcement had been made in Dakar that a dialogue had begun. Senegal associated itself with the expressions of support of other delegations. Previous speakers had emphasized the importance of renewed support to the Palestinian people during the current crucial and sensitive phase. Some of the Committee's objectives were in the process of being achieved, and a certain reorientation of its future work would be necessary. Its vigilance remained necessary in order to make peace a reality.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.